

medical school at a time when you were discouraged by a chorus of naysayers who told you not to do it. You were told that you would go deeply into debt, struggle with red tape, hold lower social status, have decreased autonomy, and be the creatures of the system rather than its masters. And you said "Nonetheless, I want to be a physician." And if you were telling the truth, you will keep your vow, return the gift, and be the richer for it. Not in material

things, perhaps, but in the important things. At the end of their career, the better paid plumbers will reflect on pipes. Physicians will have the kaleidoscope of memories of birth and death, happiness and despair, discovery, courage, intellect, humor, intimacy, elation, and service. These are the enduring riches of a physician's life. You will make a living, but, more important, you will have lived.

I wish you well.

* * *

GOING BACK

how do I message your machine
it's fifty years ago today
on the soft green fields above the Hudson
this Brevet Colonel of the United States Armed Forces
struck a cleat so deep
with mud above my right eye

that years later
the first husband of Ingrid Bergman
who was trained to wire and screw teeth
but switched to neurosurgery
had to ronger out all the bone and fashion

a metal plate with fine bolts
into my one temple
removing a huge skull tumor
and part of that same cleat
in order to cover up
an exposed brain.

Anyway it's Saturday morning again
when I'm required to go
yell and work up headaches
headaches over my children
playing at games of soccer to the Beach Chalet

where nobody believes I have
this metal screwplate in my head from
half a century when I scored
the winning goal against them
allmale jocks at West Point

and my team threw cold water on me
as everybody did then to wake you up
and hoist me high on their shoulders
and ran around that field shouting triumph with me
held so high to show those guys we won and
they could never kill anybody like us like that anymore.

so when the hard pains began from babies
tap tapping on my forehead
probing love in my mind's eye
I remember my sainted father
who was an ace pilot in France
with the 50th Aero Squadron in the First World War

saying everybody now was going to wear medals
when the Nazis overran Europe
so he sent to collect his Silver Star and wore
it secret behind his lapel which he could turn out
to show dodgers on the street—
suddenly I had to own mine too, and years later
sent for and sutured lovingly with silk
my big orange **P** just for Saturdays like this.

But when you go ask them after their game
to feel the screw in your head they laugh
say yuk and don't believe
except once in my new sweater at the airport
taking them back to show off my old college room
I couldn't pass the metal detector test
they listened and wondered why

JAMES C. NEELY, MD®
San Francisco, California